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Abstract
Language as neurosis or language as 'super-tongue for intercontinental expression'? For Eugene Jolas, a self-described 'American in exile in the hybrid world of the Franco-German frontier, in a transitional region where people swayed to and from in cultural and political oscillation, in the twilight zone of the German and French languages' (MB. p. 5), language was clearly both. For his was not just the usual bilingualism (or, more properly, the linguistic divisionism) of the Alsace-Lorraine citizen at the turn of the century; it was compounded by the acquisition of American English (already, so to speak, Jolas's birthright, born as he was in Union, New Jersey) in the years between 1909 when, as a fifteen-year old, he emigrated to New York, and 1923 when he returned to Europe.
Language became a neurosis. I used three of the basic world languages in conversation, in poetry and in my newspaper work. I was never able to decide which of them I preferred. An almost inextricable chaos ensued, and sometimes I sought a facile escape by intermingling all three. I dreamed a new language, a super-tongue for intercontinental expression, but it did not solve my problem. I felt that the great Atlantic community to which I belonged demanded an Atlantic language. Yet I was alone, quite alone, and I found no understanding comrades who might have helped me in my linguistic jungle.

Eugene Jolas, *Man from Babel* 1

Language as neurosis or language as 'super-tongue for intercontinental expression'? For Eugene Jolas, a self-described 'American in exile in the hybrid world of the Franco-German frontier, in a transitional region where people swayed to and from in cultural and political oscillation, in the twilight zone of the German and French languages' (*MB.* p. 5), language was clearly both. For his was not just the usual bilingualism (or, more properly, the linguistic divisionism) of the Alsace-Lorraine citizen at the turn of the century; it was compounded by the acquisition of American English (already, so to speak, Jolas's birthright, born as he was in Union, New Jersey) in the years between 1909 when, as a fifteen-year old, he emigrated to New York, and 1923 when he returned to Europe. What Jolas called 'the long pilgrimage ... through the empires of three languages' (*MB.* p. 65) was in many ways a great gift, the entrée to an international (or at least pan-European and North American) aesthetic. But it was also, as we shall see, a problem for a young man who aspired to be a great poet. When, in the early twenties, Jolas sent some of his poems to Frank Harris's magazine, *Pearson's*, the latter cautioned Jolas that he 'came to English too late to become a real poet in [the English] language'. 'There is, in fact', Harris remarked, 'no example in history of a poet who abandoned his native language in adolescence, and later succeeded in penetrating the mysteries of a new one. There are so many grammatical pitfalls that can never be overcome, unless the words have been felt in childhood' (*MB.* p. 49).

I shall come back to the poetry conundrum later, but, for the moment, let us consider what trilingualism did for Jolas the editor of *transition*, Jolas the
impresario of the avant-garde, and promoter of what he liked to call a ‘Euro-American philology’ (MB. p. 65). From the first, Jolas’s gift was an enormous sensitivity to different linguistic registers. Drafted in the U.S. army in 1917, he concentrated neither on military strategy nor on political issues but on the ‘new words’ that he heard from his fellow soldiers, most of them, like himself, recent immigrants: ‘profane words, crude words, voluptuous words, occult words, concrete words ... a scintillating assemblage of phonetic novelties’ (MB. p. 35). ‘I heard’, he recalls, ‘the vocabulary of the bunkhouse, the steamer, the construction camp, the brothel, the machine shop, the steel mill. I heard that lexicon of the farmhouse and the mountain cabin ... Here was truly a melting-pot, Franco-Belgian-Serbian-German-Austrian-Bohemian-Americans in our outfit mingled with native-born Americans with Anglo-Saxon names, and our conversations were often filled with picturesquely distorted English and foreign words that quickened my Babel fantasies’ (MB. p. 35).

To put these remarks in context, consider the admonition, made not so many years earlier, by Henry James in a commencement speech at Bryn Mawr College. The new immigrants, James warned the graduates, were destroying the ‘ancestral circle’ of the American language, turning it into ‘a mere helpless slobber of disconnected vowel noises’, an ‘easy and ignoble minimum’, barely distinguishable from ‘the grunting, the squealing, the barking, or the roaring of animals’. ‘The forces of looseness’, James warned, ‘are in possession of the field’, and they ‘dump their mountain of promiscuous material into the foundations’ of the language itself.2

From James’s perspective, Jolas would be part of the ‘force of looseness ... in possession of the field’. But in the aftermath of the Great War, with the increasing traffic between Americans and Europeans (Marcel Duchamp, François Picabia, and Mina Loy in the U.S.; Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes and a host of American expatriates in Paris), the intactness of American English was threatened, and the stage set for Jolas’s own linguistic experiments and for his reception of Joyce’s Work in Progress. When, in late 1926, he heard Joyce read from the opening pages of his new manuscript, Jolas marveled at the ‘polysynthetic quality’ of Joyce’s language (MB. p. 89), a language which was to become the touchstone for transition. The ‘repetitiveness of Gertrude Stein’s writings’ (MB. pp. 89-90), on the other hand, was not really Jolas’s cup of tea, even though, in deference to his co-editor Elliot Paul and to Stein’s stature as the ‘doyenne among American writers in Paris’ (MB. p. 116), he was to publish so many of her experimental pieces,3 and even though he frequently came to her defense in the pages of transition as well as in the Notes to his Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie américaine (1928).4 In his autobiography, Jolas was more candid about what he called Stein’s ‘esoteric stammering’:

Her mental attitude was remote from anything I felt and thought. For not only did she seem to be quite devoid of metaphysical awareness but I also found her aesthetic approach both gratuitous and lacking in substance. ...
We published a number of her compositions in transition, although I am obliged to say that I saw, and see today, little inventiveness in her writing. The “little household words” so dear to Sherwood Anderson, never impressed me, for my tendency was always in the other direction. I wanted an enrichment of language, new words, millions of words. (MB. p. 116, my emphasis)

More vocabulary rather than less, Joycean ‘enrichment’ rather than Steinian reduction: this ‘other direction’ was, of course, Jolas’s own. The famous manifesto ‘Revolution of the Word’, which appeared in the summer double issue of 1929 (t.16-17), declared, ‘The literary creator has the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words imposed on him by text-books and dictionaries’ (proposition #6), and ‘He has the right to use words of his own fashioning and to disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws’ (proposition #7).5 In what Jolas understood to be the watershed year of the Great Crash, T. S. Eliot, as the February 1929 issue (t.14) had declared, was the enemy, his ‘reformatory forces’ having been ‘constrain[ed]’ ‘into the straightjacket of political and religious dogma’ (t.14, p. 11). Fascism on the Right, Communism on the Left, a weak ‘desiccated humanitarianism’ in the U.S.: all these, Jolas felt, conspired against the ‘new art’ and made revolution ‘imperative’. ‘The new vocabulary and the new syntax must help destroy the ideology of a rotting civilization’ (t.16-17, p. 15).

But how exactly could the ‘disregard’ of ‘existing grammatical and syntactical laws’ contribute to the making of revolution? In Jolas’s scheme of things, multilingualism was equivalent to racial and ethnic equality. In a piece called ‘Logos’ (t.16-17), he addresses the issue of language borrowing and deformation: ‘In modern history we have the example of the deformations which English, French and Spanish words underwent in America, as in the case of Creole French on Mauritius, Guyana, Martinique, Hayti [sic], Louisiana, and Colonial Spanish’ (p. 28). When he returned to New York in 1933, Jolas wandered the streets, recording the ‘inter-racial philology’, the ‘fantasia of many-tongued words’ (MB. p. 147), accelerated by the presence of the new refugees from Hitler. He called the ‘embryonic language of the future’ the ‘Atlantic, or Crucible, language, for it was the result of the interracial synthesis that was going on in the United States, Latin America and Canada. It was American English, with an Anglo-Saxon basis, plus many grammatical and lexical additions from more than a hundred tongues. All these, together with the Indian “subsoil” languages, are now being spoken in America’ (MB. p. 147). And after World War II, Jolas reconceived ‘Atlantica’ as a universal language that ‘might bridge the continents and neutralize the curse of Babel’, not by being an invention like Esperanto or Interglossa’ (MB. p. 272), but by absorbing Anglo-Saxon, Greco-Latin, Celtic, Indian, Spanish, French Canadian French, German, Pennsylvania German, Dutch, Hebrew, the Slavic and Slavonic languages’ (MB. p. 273).

Ironically enough, this Utopian dream of a common language had as its primary exhibit the most esoteric (and arguably private) of literary compositions: Joyce’s Finnegans Wake, each issue of transition presenting
another installment of *Work in Progress*, as it was then called. Joyce's 'excellent knowledge of French, German, Greek and Italian', wrote Jolas, 'stood him in good stead, and he was constantly adding to his stock of linguistic information by studying Hebrew, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, Finnish and other tongues. At the basis of his vocabulary was also an immense command of Anglo-Irish words that only seem like neologisms to us today, because they have for the most part become obsolete' (*MB.* p. 167).

A comparable enthusiasm for Joyce's linguistic virtuosity was voiced by the young Samuel Beckett, whose essay 'Dante ... Bruno . Vico .. Joyce', appeared in the Summer 1929 issue of *transition* along with 'Revolution of the Word':

Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; *it is that something itself*. ... When the sense is dancing, the words dance. The language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent.

And again:

Mr. Joyce has desophisticated language. ... It is abstracted to death. Take the word 'doubt': it gives us hardly any sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static irresolution. Whereas the German 'Zweifel' does, and, in lesser degree, the Italian 'dubitare'. Mr. Joyce recognizes how inadequate 'doubt' is to express a state of extreme uncertainty, and replaces it by 'intwosome twiminds'.

Beckett's own early poems and stories reflect this interest in polylingualism. In 'Sedendo et Quiesciendo', which appeared in the March 1932 issue of *transition* (*t.*21), we read:

Well really you know and in spite of the haricot skull and a tendency to use up any odds and ends of pigment that might possibly be left over she was the living spit he thought of Madonna Lucrezia del Fede. Ne suis-je point pâle? Suis-je belle? Certainly pale and belle my pale belle Braut with a winter skin like an old sail in the wind. ... for many years he polished his glasses (ecstasy of attrition!) or suffered the shakes and gracenote strangulations and enthrottlements of the Winkelmusik of Szopen or Pichon or Chopinek or Chopinetto or whoever it was embraced her heartily as sure my name is Fred, dying all my life (thank you Mr. Auber) on a sickroom talent (thank you Mr Field) and a Kleinmeister's Leidenschaftsucherei (thank you Mr Beckett). ... (*t.*21, p. 16).

Here Belacqua's mix of fantasy and memory, prompted by the encounter with the astonishing Smeralda-Rima, gives rise to all sorts of foreign words and grammatical constructions: haricot skull (with its play on 'bean'), *Lucrezia del Fede* (Italian for 'Faith'), *Ne suis-je point pâle? Suis-je belle?* (French for 'Am I not pale? Am I beautiful?'), *pale belle Braut* (English + French + German for 'pale beautiful bride'), Winkelmusik (literally 'cornermusic', here a spoof on 'chamber music' and 'chamberpot'), the phonetic plays and anagrams on Chopin's name and the parodic
compounding of Kleinmeister’s Leidenschaftsucherei (‘Small master’, on the analogy of Bürgomeister, Haußmeister, die Meistersinger, etc. combined with the grandiose neologism Leidenschaftsucherei, which translates as ‘lust-searching’). Such word-play contradicts Beckett’s complaint that English usually cannot capture the sensuous flavor of an image or action: Winkelmusik, for example, nicely captures the ‘tinkle’ of the chamberpot, and the long open diphthong and voiceless stop in Braut has a very different phonetic aura from bride with its ay glide and soft voiced stop. Braut, after all, rhymes with Kraut and laut.

Still, such contrived shifts from one language to another are ultimately distracting, taking us outside the text rather than further into it. Beckett seems to have sensed this. Writing in 1931 to Charles Prentice at Chatto & Windus, he remarked that ‘of course it [‘Sedendo et Quiesciendo’] stinks of Joyce in spite of earnest endeavours to endow it with my own odours’. And surely the perceived ‘stink of Joyce’ had something to do with Beckett’s turn, in the fifties, to a ‘foreign’ language – French – for the writing of Waiting for Godot and the Trilogy. It is interesting to note that in fictions like Malone Dies, he discarded the mannerisms of his early multilingual work in favor of a much sparer, starker, monolingual writing, no longer more than marginally Joycean.

But then, Joyce’s own multilingualism had its own very special parameters. Consider the following passage from ‘Anna Livia Plurabelle’: as published in its first version in transition 8 (November 1927):

Do you tell me that now? I do in troth. Orara por Orbe and poor Las Animas! Ussa, Ulla, we’re umbas all! Mezha, didn’t you hear it a deluge of times, ufer and ufer, respund to spond? You deed, you deed! I need, I need! It’s that irrawaddying I’ve stoke in my aars. It all but husheth the lethest sound. Oronoko.

Here the opening conversation of the washerwomen begins realistically enough but soon gives way to an allusion to the Spanish prayer orar por Orbe y por Las Animas (‘pray for the Earth and the Souls of the Dead’), into which, Joyce has embedded three river names: the Orara in New South Wales, the Orba in Italy, and the Orb in France. Further: por becomes ‘poor’ so that, comically enough, the women seem to be talking about a friend or neighbour: ‘poor Las Animas’. In the next sentence, Ussa and Ulla are both names of Russian rivers, and, at the same time, as Walton Litz points out, the two words can be read as ‘us-ça’, ‘you-là’, referring to the near and far banks of the river. In the same sentences, Umbas is a portmanteau word combining umbra (‘shade, ghost’) and the Umba river of East Africa. Then, in the next sentence, Mezha fuses the Italian stage direction mezza voce with the name of the Indian river Meza and the exclamation ‘ha’, the latter leading to the shrill cries of the washerwomen: ‘you deed, you deed! I need, I need!’ These repeated exclamations suggests that in the darkness (umbra), it has become more and more difficult for the women to hear one another. ‘A deluge of times’ nicely underscores the river-flood motif, and the German
'ufer and ufer' fuses river bank (Ufer) and Russian river name ('Ufa') with the sound of 'over and over'. Ufa also means 'medium-sized fir pole or spar', so we can read the end of the sentence as saying that spar after spar is spinning down the Liffey destined for the pond in 'spond', with that word's further implication of 'despond'.

Without going any further and probing the complexities of the compound 'irrawaddying' (the Irrawaddy river + 'wadding' + 'ear' + 'irra-tional') or the final proper name 'Oronoko', (the royal slave who is the hero Aphra Behn's novel + the Orinoco river + a kind of Virginia tobacco), we can see that the linguistic paradigm of the passage in question is essentially absorptive. The language base, that is to say, is so firmly Anglo-Irish ('Do you tell me that now? I do in troth') that the foreign words and morphemes - in this case, Latin, Spanish, German, French, and Italian, not to mention the proper names of rivers in a variety of languages, all within the space of thirty-nine words - are absorbed into the fabric of English syntax and word formation, complicating and deepening meaning, without calling attention to themselves as foreign elements. Whereas a phrase like 'my belle Braut' is additive (English + French + German), the question 'Mezha, didn't you hear it a deluge of times, ufer and ufer, respond to spond', foregrounds the basic structure and rhythm of the English sentence, and inserts coinages and portmanteau words that sound familiar enough, as in the case of 'ufer and ufer' ('over and over'). The result is thus not so much a form of multilingualism as a reinvention of English as magnet language, pulling in those particles like Ussa and Ulla or deftly transposing a Spanish preposition (por) into an English adjective ('poor') so as to produce a dense mosaic of intertextual references.

Jean-Michel Rabaté has observed that the process of denaturalization I have just described, the undoing of the taxonomy of language, whether one's own or another's, was Joyce's way of declaring war against English, 'against a mother tongue used to the limit, mimed, mimicked, exploded, ruined'. Jolas's multilingualism is of a different order. Neither in German nor in French, after all, did this writer have the command Joyce had of English. The official language of his elementary school in Forbach had been German, a language inevitably associated in the boy's mind with the Prussian authoritarianism of his teachers. The French of his youth, on the other hand, was, properly speaking, a dialect 'related to that of Luxembourg and the Flemish countries' (MB. p. 9). And further: both French and German lost their hold over Jolas when, as a teen-ager, he gave up both for what he called the 'linguistic jungle' of America. Thus, despite his expertise at translating one of his three languages into either of the others, an expertise which is everywhere manifest in transition as well as in such of his volumes as the superb Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie américaine, Jolas did not quite have the hard-core language base of a Joyce or a Beckett, the latter being able to write his novels in a 'foreign' language (French), precisely because he was so sure of his native tongue.

For Jolas, in any case, the basic unit seems to have been, not the sentence,
but the word, his compilation of ‘Slangue: 1929’\textsuperscript{10} and later ‘Transition’s Revolution of the Word Dictionary’\textsuperscript{11} testifying to his passion for what the Russian Futurists called \textit{slavo kak takovoe} – ‘the word as such’. In the Dictionary, the list of neologisms, begins with six items from Joyce: \textit{constatation} (‘statement of a concrete fact’), \textit{couchmare} (‘nightmare ... cauchemar ... ’), \textit{mielodorus} (‘honeyed emphasis of odorous’), \textit{Dance McCaper} (‘An Irish danse macabre’), and \textit{Besterfarther Zeuts} (‘the Proustian divinity ... Cronos ... Saturn ... who bests us all; in other words: Grandfather Time – here Zeuts suggests both Zeus and Zeit, German for “time”’). Joyce is thus the presiding deity of the Dictionary, but Jolas includes writers from Leo Frobenius to Bob Brown (\textit{readie, ‘machine for reading’}), from Stuart Gilbert to Jolas’s pseudonymous poet Theo Rutra, whose contribution is \textit{flir} (‘to glitter’).

What, then, are the poems like? In \textit{Man from Babel}, Jolas tells us that his ‘first poems in the New World were written in German’ (\textit{MB.} p. 180), for example this perfectly conventional Romantic quatrain in iambic pentameter:

\begin{quote}
Ich steh’ auf himmelragendem Gemäuer,
Allein im Schmelz vom letzten Abendschein;
Die wilde Stadt umbraust mich ungeheur –
Mein Herz schlägt traumgebannt in Stahl und Stein.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The transfer to English within the next few years made little difference: indeed, the themes of dream, loneliness, and adolescent lyricism remain constant, whether in metrical forms, as in:

\begin{quote}
I stand desolate before the funeral pyre of my youth.
Ours is the dance and the magic of blessed dreams;
And through the world goes a wind of despair. (\textit{MB.} p. 25).
\end{quote}

Or, in free verse:

\begin{quote}
My nostalgias seek your moods
In every meditative dusk,
When I am tired with the tedium of machines,
This age is distorted with madness. ... 
Fever stalks through the cities of stone. ... (\textit{MB.} p. 51)
\end{quote}

Now compare to these passages one of Jolas’s early ‘Ur-Language’ poems appearing in \textit{transition 8} (November 1927):

\begin{quote}
Oor forest hear thine voice it winks
Ravines fog gleamen and the eyes
When night comes dooze and nabel sinks
Trowm quills unheard and lize. (p. 145)
\end{quote}

Here is Jolas working toward the ‘revolution of the word’, with the word itself as dominant: ‘Oor’ for ‘Our’ or \textit{Ur}, ‘gleamen’, a compound on the model of ‘snowmen’, ‘night comes dooze’, that is, ‘down’, fused with ‘doze’ and
'snooze', 'nabel (the German näbel for 'fog', and this 'nabel' being one that 'sinks / Trowm' - that is 'down' in the form of traum (German for 'dream') and perhaps over the 'town'. The stanza's final word, 'lize', seems to be an intentional misspelling of leise, German for 'softly', or 'in a low voice'.

The difficulty here is that the Anglo-German compounds and portmanteaus are more awkward than functional. Why is it more graphic, complex, or interesting to say 'nabel sinks / Trowm' than to say 'the fog sinks dreamily down'? Why transform the two-syllable leise (pronounced layzé) into what looks like a reference to lice or lizards, neither word applicable in the context? More successful than these multilingual poems of the late twenties are Jolas's experiments with sound play in the form of alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, metathesis, or echolalia. In Man from Babel, he recalls:

An expansion of language seemed necessary, also, in English and American poetry. Work on my translation of American poets had impressed me with the paucity of vocabulary and the poverty of the lyrical phrase, both of which seemed to me to be meager and often pedestrian. This, I felt, prevented the poet from expressing the deeper emotions which his unconscious might have evoked. I myself invented a poet I called Theo Rutra, in or der to project certain of my own neologistic work, and soon this fellow Rutra became my alter ego. I enjoyed playing him up to my friends, to which I described in detail the 'Czech immigrant living in Brooklyn' (MB. p. 109)

Here is Theo Rutra's prose poem 'Faula and Flona' (e.g., Flora and Fauna):

The lilygushes ring and ting the bilbels in the ivilley. Lilools sart slinslongdang into the clish of sun. The pool dries must. The morrowlei loors in the meaves. The sardinewings flir flar and meere. A fishflashfling hoohoos and haas. Long shill the mellohoolooloos. The rangomanc clanks jungling flight. The elcgoat mickmecks and crools. A rabotick ringrangs the stam. A plutocrass with throat of steel. Then woor of meadcalif's rout. The hedgeking gloos. And matemaids click for dartalays. (t.16-17 [June 1928], p. 34)13

Joyce is the obvious model for words like ivilley ('ivy' + 'valley') and plutocrass, and Stein is also present, the sentence 'The pool dries must' recalling 'Render clean must' in her 'Susie Asado'. But however pleasurable the language games of 'Faula and Flona', it is doubtful that, either here or in the multilingual poems, Jolas has found a way of 'expressing the deeper emotions which his unconscious might have evoked', or that the ringing lilygushes and bilbels 'expand' the language as we know it. More important: the much touted 'Revolution of the Word', a 'revolution' that seemed so glamorous to Jolas and his friends in the late twenties, found itself increasingly under a cloud as it ran into the very real political revolution that brought the Nazis to power in 1932.

In his autobiography, Jolas recalls a 1933 excursion he and his wife Maria made with the Joyces and the Siegfried Gideons to the Rhinefall of Schaffhausen, on the Swiss-German border. Sitting on the terrace of a little inn, facing the beautiful iridescent waters of the swirling Rhine, we
suddenly noticed at nearby tables several grotesquely garbed Nazi youths who had crossed the border for a Sunday excursion. They wore their Hitlerite insignia with ostentation and seemed evidently proud of this affiliation. Soon we heard their raucous voices in a dull Germanic tavern song, and I could not help recalling the days in my childhood, when we used to hear the drunken voices of the Kaiser's soldiers in the little inn next to our house. Nothing had changed' (MB. p. 134).

Note that even here, Jolas identifies people by their voices, by the way they sound. And note that the Nazis are aggressively monolingual — for Jolas, a sign of narrow nationalist identity. No wonder, then, that the worse the political situation in Europe became, the more insistently Jolas turned to multilingualism as defense. In the July 1935 issue of *transition* (now subtitled *An International Experiment for Orphic Creation*), Jolas has a poem called 'Mots-Frontiere: Polyvocables', which begins:

malade de peacock-feathers
le sein blue des montagnes and the house strangled by rooks the
tender entetement des trees
the clouds sybilfly and the neumond bruleglisters ein wunder stuerzt
ins tal with
eruptions of the abendfoehren et le torrentbruit qui charrie les
gestes des enfants. ...  

Jolas's 'Polyvocables' imply that if only poetry could contain French + German + English in equal additive measure, the treacherous frontiers increasingly separating the nations of Europe might be crossed. So the German neumond (new moon) bruleglisters ('burns and glistens') in both French and English, and the German wunder stuerzt / ins tal ('a wonder rushes into the valley') with English 'eruptions'. The 'tender entetement' ('stubbornness'), moreover, belongs not to des arbres but to 'des trees'.

This last line reminds me of nothing so much as the refugee English spoken by some of my Austrian relatives and family friends in the United States of the early 1940s: for example, *Die bell hatt geringt* ('The bell rang'), with its normative German syntax and retention of the German prefix for the past participle. In his study of *transition*, Dougal McMillan judges such passages severely, arguing that 'The circumstances of Jolas's] trilingualism have left Americans, French, and Germans uncertain as to the national category he belongs in'. But this is to judge Jolas by the very norms he was attacking; the problem is not national indeterminacy but the somewhat clumsy additive technique Jolas, unlike Joyce, used in bringing his languages together. Indeed, another poem for the July 1935 issue, 'Logocinema of the Frontiersman', makes the A + B + C method quite overt: the elegiac meditation on the poet's words tracks the poet's life from the German of his Kindesworte (Immer leuchtete der Wunderkontinent) to the French of his stormy adolescence (mes mots chevauchait une lavefrontiere; mes mots sanglotait dans une bacchanale de blessures) and then the English of the poet's young manhood in the asphalt jungle of New York:
Following this triad, the ‘Logocinéma’ continues in the same vein for six more sections of approximately sixteen lines each, now in English, but with occasional German and French intrusions, as in ‘My homewords were heimwehkrank / my loamwords were full of sehnsuch’ (Part IV), and, as the ‘motherwords’ and ‘fatherwords’ of the poet’s Alsace-Lorraine childhood come back, we find lines like ‘mes mots pleuvaient doucement sur les boulevards’, with its echo of Blaise Cendrars.17 As things become more complex (‘my fatherwords luminousshone with sun’ (Part VII), and ‘my delugewords flowed through the heraclitean sluice’ (Part VIII), Jolas tries to bring his linguistic identities together (‘patois words wedded artwords / sunverbs flightrocketed against nightnouns’, Part VIII), and finally the cinematic movement brings all three languages together in Part IX, which begins ‘Not hatte die welt ergriffen / the day was waiting for erschuetterungen’ (e.g., ‘Suffering had taken hold of the world / the day was waiting for cataclysms’, although the first word of the stanza can also be construed as the English ‘Not’) and culminates in a Last Judgement (‘the letzte gericht’) of ‘des damnés de la terre’ (Part IX). The last short stanza reads:

toutes les nuits etaicnt squellehques
die hunde schrieen sich tot in den hecken
les forêts de la lune mystère brûlaient
the world was earthquakedarkling (p. 191)

Here each of the four lines – French, German, French, English – is rhythmically independent, but each anticipates the next: the skeleton nights (line 1) contain the dogs barking themselves to death in the hedges (line 2) and the burning forests of the mysterious moon (line 3); thus (line 4) the world’s enveloping darkness signals earthquake, cataclysm. The autobiographical frame, with its emphasis on the coming into being of the ‘delugewords’, provides structure for the poet’s kaleidoscopic ‘logocinéma of the frontiersman’.

But that ‘logocinéma’, found again in such poems as ‘Intrialogue’, ‘Verbairupta of the Mountainmen’, and ‘Frontier-Poem’, produced by Jolas in the course of the following three years,18 did not survive the World War II. When, at war’s end, Jolas was stationed in Germany by the U.S. Office of War Information (OWI) and assigned to various deNazification projects as well as to the task of setting up a new free German press, the dream of a common language was over. Post-War Germany, so Jolas tells us in Man from Babel, was characterized by a ‘vague-Neo-Romanticism’; ‘a good deal of poetry was being written and published, but the ferment and audacity of
French, British, and American poetic creation was obviously lacking' (*MB.* p. 252). Indeed, the problems of the post-war years and the coming Cold War left little time for what now seemed like the luxury of polylingual poetry.

Yet this is not the end of the story. For Jolas’s ‘polyvocables’ of the 1930s, his *mots-frontiere*, look ahead to the intense poetic interest in marginal languages, dialects, creoles, pidgins, and alternate soundings that we have witnessed in recent decades, especially in the U.S.19 In the 1940s, the last decade of Jolas’s own life (he died in 1952), the flow of American writers settling in Paris and other European capitals was reversed, New York becoming the home of Kandinsky and Mondrian, André Breton and Max Ernst, Willem de Kooning and Hans Hofmann, not to mention an entire colony of German exile writers (Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht) and British expatriates (Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood), who settled in Los Angeles. And in subsequent decades, as the U.S. has been transformed by the immigration of East Asians, Africans from the Caribbean, and especially Latinos from Mexico, Central America and the South American countries, it was inevitable that the language of American poetry would begin to deviate, not only from its nineteenth-century English model (Wordsworth to Eliot) but also from the Emerson-Whitman-Dickinson-Frost-Stevens paradigm that was its more immediate source.

‘We tried’, Jolas remarks sadly in the Epilogue to *Man from Babel*, ‘to give voice to the sufferings of man by applying a liturgical exorcism in a mad verbalism’. But ‘now that the greatest war in history is over, and the nations are trying to construct a troubled peace in an atomic era, we realize that the international migrations which the apocalyptic decade has unleashed bring in their wake a metamorphosis of communication’ (*MB.* p. 272). The solution, he was quick to add, ‘will not be invented by philologists – we have seen their inventions: Idiom Neutral, Ido, Esperanto, Novial, Interglossa. These were pedantic, unimaginative creations without any life in them’ (*MB.* pp. 272-73). Rather, one must take one’s own language – and English, Jolas felt, was now the most prominent, used as it was by seven hundred million people around the world – and ‘bring into this medium elements from all the other languages spoken today’. The new language ‘should not number several hundred thousand words, but millions of words. It will not be an artificial language, but one that has its roots in organic life itself’ (*MB.* p. 272).

The notion of interjecting ‘all the other languages spoken today’ into the fabric of English is still a bit Utopian, but Jolas is on to something important – namely that multilingualism functions, not by mere addition, but by the infusion *into one’s own language* of the cultures that are changing its base. As a young reporter living in New Orleans, Jolas had been enchanted by the ‘Creole French spoken, by both whites and Negroes’, as well by the ‘language of the descendants of transplanted French Canadians from Nova Scotia’ which is Cajun. ‘Their children’, he marvelled, ‘were Ulysse, Télémaque, Olélia, Omen’ (*MB.* p. 84), And he would no doubt have been intrigued by the following:
(1) From Kamau Brathwaite, *Trench Town Rock*:20

Lass night about 2:45 well well well before the little black bell of the walk of my electronic clock cd wake me –

aweakened by gunshot

the eyes trying to function open too stunned to work out there through the window & into the dark with its various glints & glows: mosquito, very distant cockcrow, sound system drum, the tumbrel of a passing engine, somewhere some/where in that dark. It must have been an ear / ring’s earlier sound that sprawled me to the window. But it was

**TWO SHATTS**

– silence –

not evening the dogs barking or the trees blazing

& then a cry we couldn’t see of

*do*

*do*

*do*

*do*

*do*

*nuh kill me*

(2) From Alfred Arteaga, ‘Xronotop Xicano’:21

*Aguila negra, rojo chante.*
*Tinta y pluma.*
*Textos vivos,*
*written people: the vato*
*with la vida loca on his neck,*
*the vata with p.v., the ganga with*
*tears, the shining cross. Varrio*
*walls: Codices, storefront*
*placazos: varrio names,*
*desafíos, people names*
*Written cars, names etched*
in glass, ‘Land of a Thousand Dances’. Placas
*and love etched in schools.*
(3) From Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée* 22

that. All aside. From then.
Point by point. Up to date. Updated.
The view.
Absent all the same. Hidden. Forbidden.
Either side of the view.
Side upon side. That which indicates the interior
and exterior.
Inside. Outside.
Veil. Voile. Voile de mariée. Voile de religieuse
Shade shelter shield shadow mist covert
screen screen door screen gate smoke screen
concealment eye shade eye shield opaque silk
gauze filter frost to void to drain to exhaust
to eviscerate to gut glazing stain glass glassy
vitrification
what has one seen, this view
this which is seen housed thus
behind the veil. Behind the veil of secrecy. Under
the rose ala derobee beyond the veil
voce velate veiled voice under breath murmuration
render mute strike dumb voiceless tongueless.

Brathwaite, Arteaga, Cha: all three write as outsider poets – poets for whom English is, in one way or another, a foreign language. Kamau Brathwaite, to take our first example, who was born Lawson Edward Brathwaite in Barbados in 1930 and educated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, came, via a decade spent in Ghana with the Ministry of Education, to a rediscovery of his West Indian identity (the name Kamau was adopted in 1971) and to what he called, in an important book by that title, *nation language*: ‘the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean’,23 a language that combines standard English and Jamaican Creole, ‘to get at the pulse’, as Joan Dayan puts it, ‘of the street talk, gospel, or Rastafari he shared in and listened to in Jamaica’, the ‘riddim’ (rhythm) of popular talk.24 In the later work, of which *Trench Town Rock* is an example, Brathwaite fused ‘nation language’ with what he called ‘video style’:

the video style comes out of the resources locked within the computer, esp. my Macs Sycorax & Stark (but not peculiar to them or me) in the same way a sculptor like Bob’ob or Kapo wd say that the images they make dream for them from the block of the wood in their chisel

When I discover that the computer cd write in light, as X/Self tells his mother in that first letter he writes on a computer, I discovered a whole new way of SEEING things I was SAYING.25

Defined this way, ‘video style’ may be understood as another name for what we usually call visual poetics: the use of typography (size, font, placement)
and page layout to create meaning.

*Trench Town Rock*, whose opening page is reproduced above, is an elaborate collage (or *métissage*, as Edouard Glissant called it)\(^{26}\) based on poet's traumatic experience of having had his house ransacked on October 24, 1990 by armed robbers while he, gagged, and tied, helplessly waited for the gun to go off. The book juxtaposes interviews, news reports, personal diaries, and social commentary to create a powerful image of violence and victimization within a culture itself a victim of more powerful cultures. In the passage in question, the mix of Standard English and Creole is heightened by the urban rhythms of the Jamaican soundspace, beginning with 'Lass night about 2:45 well well well before the little black bell of the walk of my electronic clock cd wake me' – a dazzling sound orchestration of /l/, /w/, and /k/ phonemes in rhyming words ('well well well' / 'bell'), consonance ('walk' / 'wake'; 'electronic clock'), and alliteration ('little black bell', 'clock cd'). Such double entendres as 'aweakened by gunshatt' heighten the poem's meaning: the narrator is both awakened and weakened by the muggers; 'gunshatt' recalls shit, 'nuh' in 'do / nuh kill me', has the force of an expletive as well as the injunction of 'not'. And Brathwaite's 'video style', recalls Futurist typography in its heightening of the 'TWO SHATTIS', its emphasis on the italicized injunction 'do do do nuh kill me', and its use of up-to-date business English shorthand, as in 'cd', 'wd', the ampersands, and the precision of '2:45'. Further: the slashes within words ('some/where', 'ear/ring's') creates a series of emphatic breaking points, designed to represent the violence of the action. Everything is chaotic, dismembered, disabled.

Brathwaite's multilingualism is thus a compounding of English and Jamaican dialect, with visual language playing a central part. Alfred Arteaga's, by contrast, fuses two standard languages, English and Spanish, with a sprinkling of Aztec names and Chicano neologisms. Arteaga is a Mexican-American poet, born in Los Angeles and educated at Columbia University and the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he received his doctorate in Renaissance literature. 'These cantos chicanos', Arteaga says in his preface, 'begin with X and end with X. They are examples of xicano verse, verse marked with a cross, the border cross of alambre y rio, the cross of Jesus X in Native America, the nahualt X in méxico, mexican, xicano' (*Cantos* 5). The cross (X) thus becomes the sign of two colliding cultures and languages. The title 'Xronotop Xicano' presents one such crossing: a *chronotope* (Mikhail Bakhtin's term) literally means 'time-space', and is defined as 'a unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented'.\(^{27}\) In this case, the modern Western theoretical term *chronotope* is crossed with the adjective 'Xicano', and refers, in the poem itself, to the language of Aztlan (the ancient Aztec empire that included Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California). Within the poem itself, emblems of the Aztec Mexican past 'cross' the present of Chicano ghetto children etching their names, their curses (*desafios*), their *placas* ('graffiti'), and four-letter words, on walls,
storefronts, billboards, and car windows.

In defining the particular chronotope in question, Arteaga alternates Spanish and English phrases, the Spanish often made strange by 'Chicano' spellings and adaptations. The opening line *Aguila negra, rojo chante* refers to the black eagle devouring the serpent on the red ground of the Mexican flag. But *chante* may be the imperative of *chantar* ('to plant') or a misspelled rendition of the English noun 'chant' (or French *chanter*, 'to sing'), so that the meaning of the line remains equivocal. And *vato* in line 4 (along with the feminine *vata* in line 5) is largely untranslatable — a term designating a victim or 'lost boy', but etymologically related to the Latin *vates* ('prophet') — hence perhaps the boy as wise fool. The *vato*, in any case, has *la vida loca* ('the crazed life', 'the life of the mad') hanging around his neck, even as the *vata*’s fate is *p. v.* (*por vida*, 'for life'). So the poet must take *tinta y pluma* ('ink and pen') and record the *textos vivos* of his people, caught up in their *ganga* ('bargain') 'with tears', which is their own 'shining cross' to bear, *ganga* also alluding to the gang life of the *varrio* (*barrio*), with its members’ 'names etched / in glass' on the schoolhouse walls.

Here language is the signifier of cultural hybridity, the 'cross' between Spanish and English which is the Chicano of the North American cities. To write only in English (or only in Spanish), Arteaga implies, would deny this experience its immediacy, its felt life. Whereas Brathwaite was raised as an English speaker, and hence resorts to dialect but not to other standard languages, Arteaga must include the 'foreign' (Spanish) language base of his childhood.

A third alternative is that of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, a Korean poet whose family immigrated first to Hawaii and then to California when she was eleven. At the Convent of the Sacred Heart all-girls school in San Francisco, she learned French so that, by the time she attended Berkeley and studied film and performance art, her two written languages were a carefully acquired English and French. Accordingly, *Dictée*, the long poem Cha produced shortly before she was tragically murdered by a stranger in New York at the age of 31, is an amalgam of English and French, the latter, so to speak, her memory language. The poem tells the story of several women, united by their suffering: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Cha's mother, Demeter and Persephone, Hyung Soon Huo (a Korean born in Manchuria to first-generation Korean exiles) and Cha herself. The poet mixes writing styles (journal entries, allegorical stories, dreams), voices, and kinds of information, evidently as a metaphor of the dislocation of exile, the fragmentation of memory. Throughout her poem, Cha foregrounds the process of writing, its difficulties and revisions, its struggle to make sentences cohere. Hence, the broken sentences and Gertrude Steinian repetitions in the extract I have cited — 'Point by point. Up to date. Updated' — the endless full stops, suggesting extreme cleavage, as in 'Inside. Outside. / Glass. Drape. Lace. Curtain. Blinds. Gauze'. The search for identity, for personhood, is continually subverted. Opaque glass, veil, screen, blind, curtain, shade — these are Cha's dominant images of oppression and
occlusion.

In this context, French phrases, learned dutifully in school, are presented as welling up from the poet’s subconscious. On the page prior to the extract above, a long passage begins with the lines *Qu’est ce qu’on a vu / Cette vue qu’est ce qu’on a vu / enfin. Vu E. Cette vue. Qu’est ce que c’est enfin.* (‘What have we seen? What is the seen that we have finally seen. Seen And. This thing seen. What is it finally?’). The ‘childish’ French takes on a manic air as the sentence is broken apart and repeated for some ten lines. And, as memories of school prayers and lessons intrude on the poet’s fevered thoughts, the ‘veil’ becomes *Voile. Voile de mariée. Voile de religieuse.* The wish to shed the veil is also put in French – *ala derobée* (correctly spelled *à la derobée*) – just as the need to suppress one’s voice introduces the Italian *voce velata* (‘veiled voice’).

But where is Cha’s native language, Korean? The cited passage does not contain a single transliterated Korean word, not a single ideogram or overtly Asian reference. Evidently, the distant past of the poet’s childhood, the difficult movements of her family from place to place during the Korean War, have been blocked out. Korean appears only as an absence in the life of a woman dutifully bound to English with schoolgirl memories of textbook French. It is thus the English language that becomes the problem, the English language that must be fragmented, broken, deconstructed, reconstructed, and so on. The title *Dictée (Dictation)* thus refers to the indoctrination through language the immigrant must undergo. But *Dikte* is also the name of a Cretan goddess ‘whom Minos pursued for nine months until, about to be overtaken, she hurled herself from a cliff into the sea’. A victim, it seems, like the young girl who dutifully writes her *dictée*.

So much for Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s overt devices. But surely there is another reason Cha avoids Korean. Polyglossia remains a noble ideal, but who would be able to read the potential Korean words and phrases dotting her long poem? French and Spanish: these still have a recognition quotient, and Brathwaite’s Jamaican dialect can be sounded out and comprehended by any English speaker. But a multilingual poetry that would include Korean? Or, for that matter, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Arabic? Or again, Brazilian Portuguese? Hungarian?

The conundrum posed by *Dictée*, a poem I personally find somewhat self-conscious in its treatment of the ‘language problem’, is a conundrum Jolas could not quite anticipate. For the paradox of the contemporary situation is that the new version of multilingualism – and many poets are now following the example of Brathwaite29 – far from supporting the internationalism that animated Jolas’s poetry as well as the work collected in *transition*, has been prompted by precisely the opposite motive – a motive that is unabashedly nationalist, ethnicist, nativist. When the Brathwaite baptized Lawson Edward became, in middle life, Kamau, he turned to the ‘nation language’ of West Indian culture so as provide a more accurate representation of a people largely erased by history. His interjections of dialect, street slang, folk rhythms, Rastafari, African myth, legend, and geographical markers are
quite openly motivated by the desire to put the Caribbean experience on the map of modern poetry and fiction. In the same vein, Alfred Arteaga uses Spanish and its Chicano dialects to foreground a particular ethnic experience, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha writes from the positionality of the displaced Asian émigré woman who cannot quite locate herself in the U.S. culture of her time. Indeed, Cha’s shifts from English to French have nothing to do with any sort of tribute to the French language or French culture; on the contrary, the French phrases and idioms signal the deadness of a learned language that is not the poet’s own.

Jolas’s polyglossia, designed to bring together diverse peoples, to erase borders between the European nations, to produce a large cosmopolitan and international consciousness – *E Pluribus Unum* – has thus been radically inverted. Not the melting pot, one of Jolas’s favorite images, but the particular values of a particular underrepresented culture, not the erasure of borders, but the focus on borders, not internationalism but national and ethnic awareness: this is the realm of *mots-frontière* that has replaced Jolas’s dream of a ‘new language’ his ‘super-tongue for intercontinental expression’. Indeed, ‘intercontinental’, is now a word used sparingly and when it is, as in the case of those ICBMs with which we threaten weaker enemy nations, the vision is far from Utopian.

NOTES


3. The following Stein pieces were published in *transition*, hereafter abbreviated in the text to *t.*: ‘An Elucidation’, *t.*1 (April 1927), pp. 64-78; ‘As a Wife has a Cow’, *t.*2 (June 1927); ‘Studies in Conversation’, *t.*3 (September 1927), pp. 74-78; ‘Made a Mile Away’, *t.*8 (November 1927), pp. 155-65; ‘A Novel of Desertion’, *t.*10 (January 1928), pp. 9-13; ‘Dan Raffel, A Nephew’, *t.*12 (March 1928), pp. 51-52; ‘Descriptions of Literature’, *t.*13 (Summer 1928), pp. 50-53; ‘An Instant Answer or a Hundred Prominent Men’, *t.*13 (Summer 1928, pp. 118-30; ‘Four Saints in Three Acts, An Opera to be Sung’, *t.*16-17 (June 1929), pp. 39-72; ‘She Bowed to her Brother’, *t.*21 (March 1932), pp. 100-103. And further: *t.*14 (February 1929) contains a complete Stein bibliography of writings to date: see pp. 47-55.

4. In *transition* 3 (June 1927), which contained Stein’s ‘As A Wife Has a Cow’ as lead-off piece, as well as Laura Riding’s ‘The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein’, the editorial praises Stein as ‘abstract artist’, who ‘composes[es] her word patterns without an accompanying text of obvious explanations’ (p. 177). In the December 1927 issue, he defends Stein against the notorious attack by Wyndham Lewis (see p. 172). And in ‘The Revolution of Language and James Joyce’, *transition* 11 (February 1928), Jolas writes ‘Miss Gertrude Stein attempts to find a mysticism of the word by the process of thought thinking itself. In structurally spontaneous compositions in which words are grouped rhythmically, she
succeeds in giving us her mathematics of the word, clear, primitive and beautiful’, p. 111. The note for the Anthologie, longer than any of the others, declares ‘Tender Buttons, paru il y a quelques années, l’a montrée comme possédant un vrai génie d’innovation dans le style, et ses derniers livres n’ont aucun rapport avec les genres littéraires que nous connaissons’, p. 217.


11. t.21 (March 1932), pp. 323-25.

12. MB. p. 18. The lines read: ‘I stand on the battlements, reaching up to the sky; / Alone in the sunset glow; / The wild city roars violently around me; / My dreambound heart beats in steel and stone’.

13. The version cited in MB. p. 109 is slightly different. ‘Ivilly’ is ‘ivlleyo’, ‘morrolei’ is ‘lorroley’, ‘meaves’ is ‘neaves’, ‘sardinewungs’ becomes ‘sardine­swungs’, ‘flight’ becomes ‘light’, ‘mickmecks’ becomes ‘mickmacks’. It is not clear whether these are transcription errors, misprints, or intentional changes.

14. The subtitle first appears in t.21 (March 1932), when Jolas began to turn increasingly inward, in response to the two great totalitarianisms of the day. This issue contains the roundtable ‘Crisis of Man’, in which Stein, Jung, Benn, and Frobenius, among other, comment on the ‘evolution of individualism and metaphysics under a collectivist regime’, p. 107.

15. The title, ‘Mots-Frontiere’ is odd: the correct grammar and spelling would make it ‘Mots-frontières’. Again, ‘neumond’, ‘wunder’, and ‘tal’ should be capitalized. Throughout this and related poems, Jolas tends to reproduce German nouns without the required initial capital.


18. ‘Intrialogue’ and ‘Verairrupta of the Mountainmen’ appeared in t.22 (February 1933), pp. 21-23, ‘Frontier-Poem’ in the final (tenth anniversary) issue, t.27 (1938).

19. See, on this point, Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, Poems for the Millenium:


29. While I was completing this essay, I received the most recent issue of Chain, issue 5: ‘Different Languages’ (1998), ed. by Jena Osman and Juliana Spahr. Most of the work in this issue is bilingual (often English and Spanish) or multilingual, in keeping with the aesthetic of Brathwaite and Cha rather than the internationalism of Jolas, although many of the experiments, like Will Lavender’s ‘Glossolalia’, pp. 125-29 and Jessie Jane Lewis and Peter Rose’s ‘Pressures of the Text’, pp. 130-37, interpret multilingualism as the insertion, into the English structure, of technological languages, dialects, pictograms, visual devices, and so on. Multilingualism, in any case, is, as we see in Chain, very much in the air.